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APPROACHES FOR SERVING SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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RATIONALE AND KEY ISSUES

The number of second language learners has been increasing at a very rapid rate. According to the last census, the number of students considered to be limited English proficient (LEP) grew 2 1/2 times faster than the general population especially in large urban areas.⁽¹⁾ These children need to be included in the educational reforms, not only because of their increasing numbers, but because all children have a right to an education. In implementing our new state and district standards, we must make sure that all students are included. Second language learners have skills that are very valuable and desirable in this age of world wide markets. They are able to speak international languages. These skills should be valued and preserved as they acquire English.

Traditionally, these children were not appreciated, were ignored⁽²⁾, rejected by programs for the disadvantaged such as the old Chapter 1⁽³⁾ and even placed in classes for the retarded⁽⁴⁾. They were sometimes punished for speaking their native language because it was thought that maximum exposure was the best way for them to learn English⁽⁵⁾ and they were taught by teachers who were not trained in second language acquisition methods and not prepared to meet their needs.⁽⁶⁾ Even the programs used to meet their needs were greatly misunderstood and even thought to be harmful.⁽⁷⁾

ESL AND BILINGUAL EDUCATION

There are so many kinds of approaches to assisting LEP that it may sometimes become confusing on what approach educators should take. We will therefore examine the various approaches possible in meeting the needs of second language learners. There are two main approaches that can be found in the literature. These are ESL (English as a Second Language) and Bilingual Education. Actually, they can best be represented as a continuum of ESL and a continuum of Bilingual Education which cross each other forming a kind of scattergram of services with some services having more positive elements than others. The horizontal line contains a continuum of ESL which focuses primarily on assisting LEP acquire the English language and the vertical line contains a continuum of Bilingual Education programs (bilingual = two languages) which focuses primarily on assisting students learn the content area subjects.

Two Way
Developmental
Transitional

*Submersion**Volunteers**Peer
Tutoring**Sheltered
English**ESL
Professional**ESL Teacher***One-Way****Half Way****Translators**

SUBMERSION is neither ESL nor a program. It is a do nothing approach which allows a non-English speaking student attend classes that are conducted in English but no support system is provided to make the teaching comprehensible to the student. The student is simply left to sink or swim and usually drowns in the language because there are no supports. This approach is illegal and was declared so in 1974 by the Supreme Court decision of *Lau v. Nichols*.⁽⁸⁾

VOLUNTEERS are used when there are no professionals in the school who are able or trained to work with students who do not speak English. This can be beneficial to non-English speaking students if the assistance is frequent, regular, consistent and the volunteer is not just someone who speaks English but someone who has been trained (such as retired teacher, or someone who was in the Peace Corps, or who went through the experience themselves). However, volunteers are often well intentioned and willing to assist but many, after a short time, find that other duties beckon to them and they no longer have time to come to the school. The students then remain without assistance unless someone is hired to work with them.

PEER COACHING is used when there is a peer in the school who speaks English and the same native language as the LEP students. This can be beneficial as a short term means of assisting LEP students learn classroom protocol and become oriented to the school. For the long term, the non-English speaking students' ability to acquire English may be delayed since there is no incentive to acquire English if each have a personal translator who will speak on their behalf. The peer tutors on the other hand may begin to feel imposed upon, begin to dislike the LEP and all become frustrated and angry.

SHELTERED ENGLISH is an approach to teaching ESL by ESL teachers or trained classroom teachers who shelter or segregate LEP from the English speaking students and use English as the medium for providing content area instruction. It serves as a bridge from the ESL class to the academic mainstream. Sheltered English provides content area instruction to LEP while emphasizing development of English language skills.⁽⁹⁾ This approach has been more successful at the high school level but works very well with elementary school students who already have some foundation in English and need a system for transferring concepts and skills from one language to the other. Teachers must use content area materials that are challenging but at very low reading levels. Abstract concepts must be broken down to their lowest concrete attributes and vocabulary skills are enhanced. The teacher uses simple language with plenty of visuals, supporting cues, many relevant hands on activities as well as guarded vocabulary avoiding speed, idioms and figures of speech.⁽¹⁰⁾

ESL PROFESSIONALS have considerable experience and training in ESL teaching methods and theory and are able to work with a minimum amount of supervision with small groups of LEP. These educators are especially effective if they are from the ethnic community and have been afforded a living wage with benefits so that they can look upon their work as a profession. This enables them to remain in the program

and eliminates high turn overs and the need to provide new training. They are especially effective in situations where the students are spread out over a large area, come from many different language groups, and there are no teachers who speak their languages. Often these professionals become travelling tutors who visit various schools and work with students on a regular basis for at least one period each day. They use a diagnostic prescriptive approach and integrate the students into the regular curriculum.⁽¹¹⁾

ESL TEACHERS have been trained in second language acquisition and have been endorsed as such. These teachers can be used at all levels K-12. They are most effective at the higher levels such as middle school, high school and college. Their focus is on assisting the student acquire English and they may or may not work in the regular curriculum area unless they are using a Sheltered English approach. ESL teachers can be compared to the foreign language teachers in that both are teaching students to acquire a second or foreign language. Unless they are working in the curriculum area, the ESL teachers are the most expensive way to serve students because they require bilingual support to supplement what LEP are missing in the content area subjects. This leads us naturally to the vertical continuum of Bilingual Education.

TRANSLATORS are one of the most abused and ineffectual groups in Bilingual Education.⁽¹²⁾ In these cases, people who speak the students' languages are hired as teachers aides but end up doing the teachers' work at very low wages. As a result there is usually a high turn over of people in this group since they are usually waiting for something better to come along. These translators usually have little education and may be considered as poor role models by the ethnic community. Their role is to listen to the teacher and then translate what the teacher is saying to the student. This becomes very disruptive in the classroom. They often end up teaching the students themselves even though they are not teachers and do not know the content area subjects well. When they are left in the classroom to translate, the students "turn off" the teacher who speaks in English and simply wait for the translation. Thus, the student receives inferior assistance in the content area subjects and no English. Language acquisition in English is postponed to a later time delaying the students integration into the mainstream.

HALF WAY BILINGUAL programs use teachers who are "half way" to being bilingual. These are usually used in cases where there is an extreme shortage of teachers who speak the students' language and someone who has had a brief exposure to the language is asked to serve as a bilingual teacher until someone who is more qualified can be found or until the person can master the language. This approach has obvious disadvantages. Often the students are teaching the teacher. Because of little knowledge of the language, the teachers cannot converse on a professional level with parents. The teachers end up being burned out because of the pressure of having to double their work preparing classes in English and the second language. They also become frustrated because acquiring second languages takes so much time (5 to 7 years).

The **ONE WAY BILINGUAL** program is when teachers in a foreign country are recruited to work in bilingual programs. This may assist the students in learning the content area subjects but it becomes a "one way street" since the teacher usually can speak little or no English and therefore cannot teach the students English. Other complications can arise in that the foreign teachers may not be familiar with the American curriculum, methods of teaching and second language acquisition processes. Even the dialect of the foreign teacher may be different and the American born students may not be able to understand it.

The **TRANSITIONAL BILINGUAL** program was widely used in the US and was one of the Title VII programs. It employed bilingual teachers whose emphasis was on transitioning the student from the native language as quickly as possible to English in usually two or three years.⁽¹³⁾ This program accelerated the students' assimilation into the mainstream in a negative way. It turned out to be a "replacement program"

where the student replaced the native language and culture with English and the American culture. They moved, for instance, from monolingual Spanish to monolingual English and became unable to converse with their families. They were ashamed of their parents and relatives and considered them inferior. Since they only had a few years of Bilingual Education their English had only reached a conversational level and they could not read or write in any language. This led to dysfunctional behavior, high retention and drop out rates and high referrals to Special Education.

The **DEVELOPMENTAL BILINGUAL** program is now emphasized by Title VII.⁽¹⁴⁾ It still employs bilingual teachers but attempts to overcome the deficiencies of Transitional Bilingual Education. It is sometimes called "late exit" since the students stay in the program until they can be literate in the native language as well as in English. This usually takes 5 to 7 years. Then instead of replacing the first language with English, the first language is enhanced and is used as a foundation upon which to build English. Students are taught to cherish their language and culture and bilingualism is emphasized where the student has two languages and has not merely replaced one for the other. Studies show that bilingualism enhances adaptation to the two cultures and languages and minimizes negative and dysfunctional behavior.

TWO WAY BILINGUAL This program has been used for many years in Canada with great success.⁽¹⁵⁾ It is a program in two languages where the students are segregated according to language and immersed in a second language.⁽¹⁶⁾ Ideally 50% of the LEP are of one language and 50% are English speaking. In the Canadian model, each group begins by being immersed in the second language but with a bilingual teacher who understands when the student uses the native language and provides support and positive modeling. If this is a French-English bilingual program, the English speaking students study in French and the French speaking students study in English. Each year, more and more of the native language is introduced until by the sixth grade they receive most of their instruction in their native language. By this time, as studies show, these students are one year above their peers in the content area subjects.

Variation of the two way bilingual have also been successful.⁽¹⁷⁾ In many parts of the US, instead of being immersed in the second language, the students begin in their native language and each year more and more of the second language is introduced. Another variation is in the curriculum where 50% of the subjects are in one language and 50% are in another. The main focus is always to provide two ways of becoming bilingual. One for native speakers of English and one for native speakers of other languages. This program is sometimes called the "International School" or "The International Program." This program does not work if the students speak many different languages and there are not enough students of one single language besides English to have a 50/50 mix. It also requires that the English speaking parents will support this program. Usually this has not been a problem since so many English speaking parents see the benefits to having their children speak two languages. Often waiting lists to enter the program have to be set up.

Is ESL better than Bilingual Education? The answer is simply that all these programs have strengths and weaknesses and are usually not feasible by themselves in many situations. One program by itself may have serious deficiencies but when combined with another becomes a model program. The best programs for LEP students are combinations of ESL and Bilingual Education. Ideally, Bilingual Education should be the umbrella with ESL as a necessary component. The children need to acquire English in order to be successful in this society but this should not be at the expense of their education. They should not fall behind in the content areas subjects while they are acquiring English. A developmental program could use ESL teachers to provide the English component to the bilingual program and an ESL program could use bilingual paraprofessionals to enhance their ESL program. Any program could use volunteers, peer tutoring, translators and professionals in the field. The more LEP are included in the regular curriculum and are

challenged with high State and District standards the greater will be their success.

These programs cannot be developed in a vacuum. Many factors must be considered in implementing them.⁽¹⁸⁾ The school demographics must be considered. Are the LEP from many language groups or from one? Are they American born or immigrants? Have they had a formal education? Do they read and write in their primary language? Other factors must be considered such as personnel, time, costs, funds available, materials, curriculum, etc. When all these factors are considered, then the type of program or programs to meet the needs of LEP can be better designed and implemented. The focus should always be to use the best possible method to teach all students what they need to know in order to become productive members of our society.

EVALUATION

How do we know if our program is meeting the needs of second language learners? In a study of school reform and student diversity, Catherine Minicucci,⁽¹⁹⁾ examined how exemplary schools made special academic support available to LEP students. They found the following:

- All schools held high expectations for learning and personal development of LEP students
- The curriculum was integrated across disciplines and made real-life applications related to student experiences
- The schools used thematic units to integrate the subjects
- LEP students became independent learners who could take responsibility for their own learning
- Cooperative learning was used extensively
- All schools were 'parent friendly' and had bilingual staff members
- Students belonged to 'families' in school sometimes staying with the same teachers for 5 years.
- Time was used innovatively with extended days, time for teacher collaboration, Saturday programs, summer programs and after school tutorials.
- The focus always remained on helping the students achieve English literacy.

We know we are meeting the needs of our second language learners when they are acquiring English and learning the content area subjects. They are not only able to speak English and their native languages but are literate in both and fully bilingual. They have preserving their native language and culture and have caught up to their English speaking peers in regular programs. They stay in school and graduate onto college.

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